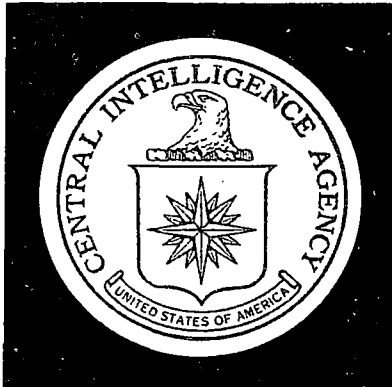


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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4 February 1968

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HIGHLIGHTS

The Communists are maintaining considerable momentum in their offensive although the intensity of their actions has tapered off. Communist resistance in Hue is still strong, while in Saigon only scattered clashes have been reported. Popular reaction to the Communist offensive appears to be one of shock at the ability of the Viet Cong to carry off such attacks and at the government's failure to prevent them. Some underlying strains in the government leadership have been revealed and intensified by the crisis.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

The Communists have maintained considerable momentum in their offensive although the intensity of their actions has tapered off (Paras. 1-2). Heavy fighting in the city of Hue continued throughout the weekend (Para. 3). Northern Quang Tri Province is relatively quiet but the situation along the DMZ continues to be threatening (Paras. 4-7). Considerable allied progress has been reported throughout II Corps although several coastal towns continue to be threatened (Paras. 9-10). Several sharp clashes have been reported in Saigon and there are indications of enemy concentrations outside the city (Paras. 11-12). All of the major towns in IV Corps are reported under friendly control although there is still fighting on the periphery of some cities (Paras. 13-15).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

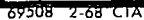
Popular reaction to the Communist offensive appears to be one of shock at the ability of the VC to carry off the attacks and at the government's failure to prevent them (Paras. 1-3). After a slow start, the government is now taking steps to handle the massive clean-up effort (Paras. 4-5). Some underlying strains in the government leadership have been revealed and intensified by the crisis (Paras. 6-7). The government has been fairly successful in gaining statements of support from influential political figures and power groups (Paras. 8-12).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Communists have continued to maintain considerable momentum in their offensive, but the intensity of their actions has tapered off and no new attacks were reported on the night of 3-4 February. Allied forces have had some success in clearing enemy elements from Hue, but a strong Communist force is still entrenched in the citadel area. Improvement is reported in most other areas, and only scattered clashes have been reported around Saigon. There are indications, however, that the Communists may be planning new offensives around Saigon and Da Nang, and that they are continuing to make battle preparations around Khe Sanh and the DMZ area.

2. Enemy killed in the fighting since 30 January now total around 15,000 and another 5,000 have been captured. The Communists have apparently suffered significant losses of high-level cadre. Information from prisoners indicates that there has been widespread involvement of units or men from main and local force units, as well as of guerrilla units or new recruits especially trained for the offensive. There are indications that the Communists retain substantial reserves that could be committed to new offensives.

I Corps

3. Heavy fighting continued throughout the weekend in the city of Hue. Sporadic contact was reported between allied and enemy forces in the citadel, north of the Huong River, but such key points as the citadel airstrip were in allied hands. The allies are continuing to sweep areas outside the citadel, although enemy troops are still holed up in scattered buildings on the southern bank of the river. US Marines have recaptured the provincial jail, but some 2,500 prisoners, including 300-500 Viet Cong, apparently escaped in the initial enemy

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attack. The arrival of two US Marine supply convoys from Phu Bai has been delayed by heavy enemy sniper fire along the approach route.

4. Interrogation of a prisoner taken in the Hue fighting indicates that at least some of the enemy force consisted of local Viet Cong or regroupees from the north. The captive claimed that the Hue city municipal unit and the 800th Viet Cong Battalion were tasked with attacking allied strongpoints and were prepared to hold out for as long as a week. There have been indications of enemy reinforcements on the outskirts of the town, but these have apparently been prevented from joining up with elements in the city.

5. The military situation in northern Quang Tri Province remains relatively quiet, but near the DMZ there are indications of increasing tactical preparations by North Vietnamese units from Khe Sanh in the west to the coast. Elements of the 90th Regiment, formerly engaged in logistical activity north of Khe Sanh, have begun to pass messages dealing with reconnaissance activity. This suggests a possible shift in the unit's mission toward combat activity. A battalion of the 803rd Regiment/324B Division in the southeastern DMZ area was instructed to reconnoiter the terrain in preparation for an attack by an entire regiment.

6. The Communists have the capability to strike at any time with two divisions against Khe Sanh, with one division against US positions south of the DMZ in the central part of Quang Tri Province, and with a division-equivalent in the northeastern corner of the province. In Quang Tri city, Communist forces have been routed but apparently control much of the surrounding pacification area; and efforts to clear them may cause further civilian casualties.

7. [REDACTED] a major concentration of enemy forces--involving elements of the North Vietnamese (NVA) 2nd Division, the NVA 31st Regiment, and the NVA 368B Regiment--between Da Nang and the southern

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border of Quang Nam Province. These forces, together with other enemy elements north of Da Nang, could be planning to sever communications routes leading to the city, possibly in concert with further rocket attacks on Da Nang Air Base. A US Marine battalion operating south of Da Nang on 3 February contacted a large enemy force, but few details are available on the engagement.

8. About ten miles from Tam Ky, the capital of Quang Tin Province, enemy forces on 3 February struck a South Vietnamese field position and a nearby refugee village, causing considerable damage as well as casualties among the civilians. there has been evidence of a major Communist buildup in this area.

II Corps

9. The situation improved over the weekend in several hard-pressed towns, particularly in the central highlands, and all major population centers in the corps area are now considered in friendly hands. Communist forces appear to be withdrawing from Kontum city, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot, and Da Lat, although sizable numbers of enemy troops remain in or around these towns. In Kontum, light mortar and small-arms fire was reported continuing on 4 February, and a probe against the airfield was repulsed. Ban Me Thuot was reported quiet, but a battalion of the NVA 33rd Regiment was identified [REDACTED] as being just south of the town. Only sporadic sniper fire was reported in Da Lat. 3.3(h)(2)

10. The major fighting in coastal areas of the corps was around Phan Thiet city, which was attacked on 2 February by an estimated three enemy battalions. These forces were routed from the immediate city area by 4 February and are reported by a prisoner to be withdrawing to a base northeast of the city. A small attack on a village north of the town on 4 February may have been designed to cover this withdrawal. Farther north along the coast Communist forces on 3 February ambushed two South Korean convoys near Qui Nhon.

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III Corps

11. Several sharp clashes occurred around Saigon over the weekend involving military and police action against small bands taking refuge in buildings near the center of the city and in its outlying precincts. The city appeared generally quiet on 4 February, although there continue to be reports of enemy forces concentrated not far from the city. Prisoners taken in the past few days have alleged that 25 to 30 battalions were massing north and south of the city, but there has been no confirmation of such a presence. [REDACTED] a possible distant threat to the Saigon area from elements of the NVA 7th Division, which is situated about 30 miles north of the city and is not yet believed to have seen action in the recent offensive. On the other hand, the headquarters of the 165th Regiment/7th Division has been moving away from Saigon. Several elements of the Viet Cong 5th and 9th divisions, the other two large enemy forces in III Corps, have been involved in the fighting although one regiment, possibly subordinate to the 5th, has not been noted. Prisoners taken in Saigon have claimed to be from elements of all three subordinate regiments of the 9th Division. 3.3(h)(2)

12. East of Saigon, the provincial capitals of Xuan Loc and Phuoc Le, which came under enemy attack on 2 and 3 February, were apparently quiet on 4 February, although Xuan Loc remains tense and anticipates new attacks. On the night of 3-4 February, a US base and a district town in Binh Long Province--north of Saigon near the Cambodian border--were attacked, with the enemy using 122-mm. rocket fire against the base. Although no reports of casualties have been received, the Viet Cong reportedly have taken over many hamlets in the province and have set up roadblocks around the provincial capital of An Loc. Elsewhere in the northern part of III Corps, a Communist force of unknown size overran several sections of the district town of Tan Uyen on the night of 3-4 February, and at least two US brigade-strength base camps nearby reported heavy rocket and mortar attacks. US army sweeps around this area as well as northwest of Saigon also reported sporadic contacts over the weekend.

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14. At least two enemy battalions are still on the outskirts of Ben Tre city and the town was struck by mortar fire on the night of 3-4 February. An enemy force of unknown size attacked Sa Dec city on the morning of 4 February, penetrating the MACV compound before being driven off; some enemy forces are still believed to be in the city. The town was also hit on 3 February, with its Chieu Hoi center a key target. Another new attack was reported on 4 February against Cao Lanh city, but the estimated two enemy companies involved withdrew after an hour. Vinh Long city, under heavy attack on 2 February, was considered to be secured on 3 February, but its airfield was being harassed by mortar fire on 4 February.

15. Partially overrun Chau Phu city was reported to be under almost complete government control by 3 February and no further attacks have been reported. Over 4,000 homes were reported destroyed and 100 civilians were killed. A prisoner taken in the earlier fighting claimed that Viet Cong main forces in his area were told they were to "liberate" provincial capitals, and that provincial units and guerrillas would liberate district towns. He also claimed that ten party members entered Chau Phu when the city was attacked with the purpose of organizing a provisional government. This prisoner claimed that he had first heard of a "coalition government" about six months ago, but that he had received no briefings on the subject until just before the Tet offensive.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Popular reaction in Saigon and other towns struck in the wave of enemy attacks since 30 January appears to be primarily one of shock at the show of enemy strength and the government's failure to prevent the attacks. As enemy troops have gradually been driven out of most towns, there appears to be some growing understanding of the magnitude of the military challenge that faced government defenders and also increased anger at the Viet Cong for the timing of their offensive at Tet and for the havoc they created. At the same time, there is some criticism of the government's slowness in organizing itself to cope with the massive dislocations and casualties among the populace.

2. Clearly, it will be some time before the full political and psychological effects of the Communist offensive can be assessed. This is certain to vary from province to province, depending on what further actions the enemy takes and the government's success in restoring order and providing assistance. In the countryside, moreover, evidence of Viet Cong activities in the villages and hamlets is only beginning to emerge. Several major towns in the highlands and the delta have sustained major damage. A massive refugee and casualty problem is already apparent--some 2,400 civilians have been admitted to hospitals in Saigon alone--and food shortages are beginning to appear in some areas.

3. Despite some evidence that much of the populace in some provinces may have been aware of the impending attacks, presumably through troop movements and advance infiltration of agents into towns, there continues to be no indication that the Communist show of strength and subsequent propaganda appeals have attracted any significant public support. They have, however, spread considerable public confusion and widespread fear; at least one province has reported that rural

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inhabitants believed the enemy's claims of total victory, and even a few voices in Saigon have reportedly commented that there is no hope but to compromise with the Viet Cong. There has been some dissatisfaction over the damage and casualties inflicted by counterattacking government troops, and even isolated reports of ARVN looting. On the other hand, in some areas such as Quang Tri city, there has been an impressive display of public appreciation for allied success in driving off enemy attacks.

3. Reactions in Saigon are as mixed as elsewhere in the country, but the population remains uneasy, particularly in Cholon where much of the fighting has taken place. The government on 3 February lifted its curfew in the city for six hours to permit citizens to purchase food, and is now reducing the curfew from 24 hours to the hours of 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. Although there are estimated to be adequate food supplies for the coming week, distribution problems have arisen and prices of essential foods have begun to soar, doubling and tripling in many cases. Some essential services including water supply have been disrupted, but these are gradually being remedied. Electric power is now 75 percent of normal, and the government expects shortly to tackle the problem of garbage collection and to begin widespread immunizations against epidemics spreading from poor sanitation and the large numbers of dead throughout the city. All government employees have been ordered to resume normal work on 5 February, and those operating essential services were to be back on the job on 4 February.

Government Measures

4. After some fits and starts, the Saigon government is now beginning to gear itself for the massive effort of emergency assistance to victims of the recent fighting. President Thieu on 3 February issued a statement designed to reassure the public that the situation was under

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control, to appeal for support and understanding of the emergency controls being instituted, and to dispel rumors that a coalition government with the National Liberation Front might be imposed in Saigon with US collusion. Top government officials have been meeting frequently for the past three days to determine priorities with the US, and to get needed services rolling. On 4 February, Thieu announced the formation of a joint US-GVN task force, headed by Vice President Ky with Ambassador Komer as his counterpart, to assess requirements and assure that needs are met. Thieu, who has reportedly delegated broad authority for handling military matters to Joint General Staff chief Vien and Police Director Loan, also promised that the army and police would provide food and assistance to needy victims.

5. The proposed task force will have an operations center in Saigon for the entire country, as well as local centers in the provinces. It will evidently concern itself with such tasks as reopening lines of communications, mobilizing resources, preventing hoarding, intensifying the information effort, appeals for unity, and requests for third country assistance. Telegrams are being sent to each of the 44 provinces requesting that they outline their damage and requirements.

Frictions in the Government

6. Some underlying strains are already evident among top-level GVN leaders on the task force. Thieu apparently suspects that the US may be trying to promote Ky's fortunes, according to a high-ranking Vietnamese official, but he agreed "without enthusiasm" to Ky's new role. He also agreed to Ky's suggestion that Major General Thang, the recently resigned pacification chief on the Joint General Staff, be designated Ky's principal deputy. Moreover, according to the same source, General Vien, who is nominally in charge of coordinating emergency services in Saigon, has begged off on grounds of pressing military and security problems. He reportedly has designated Lieutenant General Tran Ngoc Tam, who is "completely ineffectual," to serve in his stead on the task force.

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7. Most of the criticism of the government, however, centers about Prime Minister Loc, who has allegedly shown little inclination or ability to take decisive action in the crisis. Members of the government and of the National Assembly are complaining of Loc's performance, holding him responsible for inefficiency among other ministers, and speculating that he may be dropped when the immediate crisis ends. One clandestine source has claimed that Loc's initial attitude was that civilians, in the government and in groups on the outside, could do nothing constructive until the military had restored some order. It is also reported that his current concern is that his cabinet will be dissolved through military pressure and that Thieu will rule by decree.

Statements of Support for the Government

8. Some effort is now being made, however, by both Thieu and Loc to gain expressions of support from the National Assembly and leading civilian circles. On 3 February, the chairmen of the Upper and Lower houses of the assembly issued a statement of support for the government's actions in meeting the crisis, a denunciation of the Viet Cong, and an appeal for public unity and support. A similar statement was issued by the Upper House National Defense Committee, which also called for joint executive-legislative cooperation, and by the Lower House in a session on 4 February. The Upper House is scheduled to meet on 6 February and is expected to take similar action. Several deputies not in Saigon have been active in trying to rally the populace in their own provinces.

9. Although there is a considerable amount of mixed feeling among assembly deputies concerning the extent of political damage done by the Communists and in regard to the government's performance, most apparently believe that they have little choice but to pledge full support and to assist where possible. Dissatisfaction centers principally over the authority cited by Thieu for his declaration of martial law and for the imposition of press censorship--a state of war decree issued on 24 July 1965 and claimed to be still in effect. The deputies

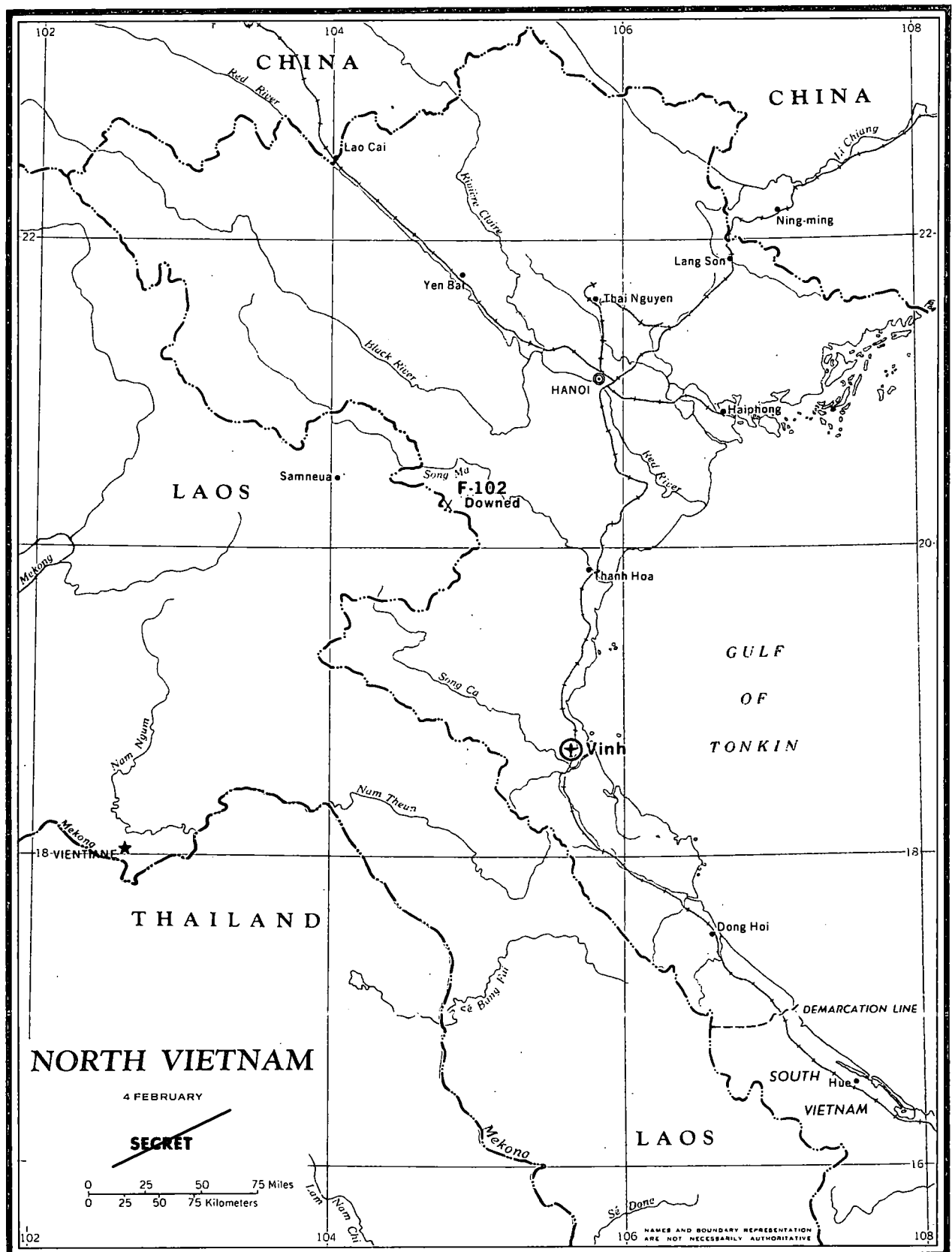
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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Two North Vietnamese MIG-21s supported by a third fighter aggressively engaged a flight of two US F-102s over the DRV/Laotian border on 3 February and downed one of the US aircraft with an air-to-air missile.

2. The Communist fighters involved in the engagement were flown by the same two highly qualified pilots who made several flights to the area of Vinh Airfield in the southern DRV in January. These flights, together with the recent establishment of air defense communications near Vinh, have suggested that the Communists may be preparing to undertake intercept operations in southernmost North Vietnam and the DMZ area, possibly against B-52s.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Communist military offensive is still being portrayed by Hanoi and the Liberation Front as a spontaneous popular uprising of "revolutionary forces" aiming at overthrowing and replacing the Saigon government. The political and military role of the Liberation Front seems to be downplayed deliberately. The "revolution," as the Communists call the offensive, is said to have generated new, broadly based organizations which, in conjunction with the Front, will eventually establish a coalition government for South Vietnam. These new organizations, the propaganda insists, are winning popular support, but there is an urgent note in Vietnamese Communist statements stressing the benefits of joining in the struggle or of at least supporting it.

2. On the political side, the Communists claim the military offensive has brought about the formation of political "alliances" throughout the country which are supported by such noncombatant groups as students, intellectuals, women, and businessmen, but whose actual composition and organization have not been spelled out. These alliances, the propaganda implies, will have a key role in setting up a coalition government. An appeal from the alliance in Hue, broadcast by the Viet Cong radio on 2 February, stated this objective most clearly. For the first time, it claimed that one of the alliance's goals was the establishment of a "national coalition administration" in the South and the setting up of normal relations with the North in order to effect reunification. Previous appeals by Saigon and Hue "alliances" as well as by a so-called "National Leadership" of the "Alliance" have called for negotiations with the Front, but not for the formation of a coalition government or the reunification of Vietnam.

3. The military struggle is also being portrayed as based on popular support. Most recent statements by Hanoi and the Front avoid singling out the Viet Cong ("Liberation Armed Forces") as the focal point of

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the Communist military effort and imply that the offensive has spawned new "revolutionary" military forces. A Front broadcast on 3 February, carrying an appeal from the Viet Cong command, praised the "revolutionary people" for "simultaneously" rising up. It also hailed the "insurrectionary troops" and patriotic armed forces in the "revolutionary army" for rising up and "coordinating" their struggle with the Viet Cong, and called for united action against the common foe. In a broadcast the same day, Hanoi also praised the "revolutionary forces." It claimed such forces in Saigon were responsible for the "armed uprising" and that they had created an "insurrection committee" that eventually would establish a "revolutionary administration" in the city. A similar revolutionary group has been formed in the Tri-Thien-Hue area (Quang Tri, Thua Thien provinces), according to another Hanoi broadcast. These groups, like the "alliances," have made strong appeals to the people for support or cooperation, and have promised position, rewards, and safety in return.

4. There is virtually no evidence of any substance to these Communist claims. Even the existence of the "revolutionary organizations" and "alliances" is unproved and there is nothing to suggest they have any popular support or following. The Communists' purpose in creating such an organizational facade remains unclear. They may have intended to use it to help set up a "coalition government" if their offensive won popular support, and they may still intend to do so even though this has not happened. They could also use these organizations as scapegoats for a failure of their "uprising" if their current efforts peter out.

Reaction in Hanoi

5. Several Hanoi commentaries have suggested that the current military offensive is but one battle in a more prolonged struggle. The Hanoi party paper on 3 February said the current fighting was creating conditions for additional military victories. The

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North Vietnamese Army journal the previous day called for the southern forces to maintain and develop their victories, enlarge their fronts, and develop their revolution.

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the DRV military command has sent a message to the Front units in Hue and Saigon assuring them that the North Vietnamese armed forces stand "ready every second to coordinate their actions with them." In Hanoi itself, [REDACTED] mass meetings are being held by various political and religious groups in support of the offensive in the South. It would appear that the North Vietnamese authorities are utilizing the offensive in the South to pump up morale in the North.

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